

## How poachers kill jobs

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**INTERNATIONAL** tourism to Africa reached record levels in 2013, with 56 million tourists bringing in N\$410 billion.

Significantly, 80% of them came to see the continent's wildlife. This valuable economic injection could increase by 10% a year – provided poachers don't wipe out the iconic species that safari goers travel here to see.

This is according to a new report by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), which highlights the economic importance of this sector and encourages tourism authorities and travel operators to collaborate in fighting against poaching and raising awareness of these issues among tourists.

Africa is the world's major wildlife-viewing tourism destination, but figures have previously not been readily available. The UNWTO report, *Towards Measuring the Economic Value of Wildlife Watching Tourism in Africa*, found tourism to Africa has been increasing steadily, with an average annual growth rate of about 6,1% a year between 2005 and 2013.

During the same period, arrivals grew from 35 million in 2005 to reach a new record of 56 million in 2013 – and numbers are predicted to more than double during the upcoming decade, reaching 134 million international arrivals in 2030 ...

provided, of course they can still view elephants, rhinos, lions, gorillas and other iconic species.

The global market size of wildlife tourism has been estimated at 12 million trips annually and is growing at a rate of about 10% a year.

UNWTO researchers found that a wildlife-watching tour typically comprises a group of six people and lasts 10 days. The iconic "Big Five" (African elephant, Cape buffalo, leopard, lion and rhinoceros) are the main drawcards in Southern and East Africa, with gorilla trekking in Central Africa growing in popularity.

The report revealed that the average price tourists pay per day on a standard tour is N\$2 900. A luxury wildlife-watching tour shoots up to N\$9 000. Add out-of-pocket expenses averaging N\$665 a person a day and you have a lucrative industry boosting African economies.

Entrance fees for protected areas in 14 countries alone generated an estimated N\$1,7 billion – and researchers said this was just a small sample.

UNWTO sees the report as a step towards a more systematic measurement of the economic value of the wildlife-watching tourism market segment in Africa.

It focuses on non-consumptive forms of wildlife tourism i.e the experience of observing wildlife in natural and non-captive habitats, as on safaris, birdwatching tours and gorilla trekking, as opposed to hunting trips. A total of 48 governmental institutions (tourism authorities and conservation agencies) from 31 African countries participated in the survey, as did 145 tour operators selling trips to Africa from 31 different countries. Half were tour operators mainly from Europe (generally the principal source market for Africa) and 50% were Africa-based tour operators.

Not surprisingly, tourism is considered a priority sector for many African countries and over 30 have identified tourism as a national priority within the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF).

Tourism development is seen as a vehicle for economic growth, job creation and poverty alleviation, thanks to the multiplier effects on local and national economies of the broad range of goods and services included in its value chain.

As a labour-intensive industry, its ability to create jobs, particularly for women, young people and marginalised populations, is widely recognised. East Africa and Southern Africa were the top wildlife destinations for international tourists, while Central and West African tourism authorities were keen to develop this type of tourism.

North African countries on the Mediterranean were popular with budget travellers, presumably because of their proximity to Europe.

Safaris were the most popular type of wildlife watching (offered by 96% of the participating tour operators), followed by birdwatching (80%).

They were frequently combined with other activities, for instance the popular beach and bush safaris, and on average generated more revenue per capita than tourists to the North African states.

In countries that are not considered classic safari destinations, observing great apes, marine wildlife and tracking of particular species were particularly important.

As a result, national parks, protected areas and wildlife are viewed as the countries' most important tourism assets. The ongoing poaching crisis, driven by a dramatic increase in the illicit trade in wildlife products since 2005, is a serious threat to this vital segment's economic performance and potential growth, said the report.

Poaching, often referred to as 'wildlife crime', directly affects long-term sustainability and development opportunities, including employment opportunities for local communities in accommodation, restaurants and guiding in the conservation areas.

"Communities also function as suppliers of goods and services, primarily food and beverages, and sometimes receive indirect tourism benefits through redistribution of revenues from protected area entrance fees and funds allocated to community development projects," noted the report. Poachers' guns could effectively kill these benefits.

While the majority of protected area authorities were involved in anti-poaching measures, researchers found that tourism authorities were only involved to a minor extent and most did not distribute information on poaching to tourists. They suggested mobilising the tourism sector in anti-poaching campaigns and raising awareness, and to help finance anti-poaching initiatives.

The report found that wildlife crime, involving transnational networks of well-resourced and organised groups, was a clear threat to the long-term sustainability of tourism and potentially jeopardised the development opportunities linked to the sector.

It threatens to undermine Africa's conservation achievements to the point that some of the most iconic species are set to become extinct within only a few decades – most prominently, elephant and rhino, but also other big mammals such as lion and gorilla.

Apart from the detrimental environmental, economic and social consequences cited are the negative effects on poverty alleviation.

"Poaching deprives communities of their natural capital and cultural heritage and undermines sustainable economic development and poverty alleviation.

"Wildlife crime is also a challenge that threatens national security, undermines government authority, breeds corruption and restricts the potential for sustainable investment, constraining a country's social and economic development.

"Wildlife crime is threatening the very existence of iconic species that are essential to Africa's image as home to the world's top wildlife destination and thus jeopardises the basis of one of Africa's most important tourism products," concludes the report.

– Rand Daily Mail